**The Right (and Wrong) Way to do Rotational Exercises**

There’s a right way and a wrong way to do every exercise. For rotational exercises, the wrong way is done far too frequently.

Why? It’s a perception issue. At first glance, it appears that rotational exercises, like Med Ball Rotational Throws, train your obliques. You twist your trunk and presto! You have defined obliques framing your abs.

But according to Pete Holman, a strength coach, physical therapist and expert on rotational training, performing the wrong rotational exercises or doing the right ones incorrectly can cause serious long-term injury.

**What Exactly is a Rotational Movement?**

Rotation is your body’s way to create horizontal force from a standing position. The process is a synchronized motion starting at your feet and typically finishing with your hands.

One of the best examples of rotation is throwing a ball. You start perpendicular to your target, then drive through your legs and rotate your torso before finally releasing the ball. Your lower body generates the majority of the power, and your core helps to transfer it to your upper body.

There are many different types of exercises you can perform, but common moves include Med Ball Rotational Throws, TRX Rip Trainer Samurai Strikes, Cable Chops and Resistance Band Chops.

Problems arise when athletes twist through their lumbar spine, or lower back. “The lumbar spine is designed for flexion and extension,” explains Holman. “In the physical therapy clinic, we see 85-90 percent of lower-back injuries occur because of the rotation.”

The injuries typically occur when athletes try to train their obliques with this type of movement. Although the obliques are involved in rotational exercises—they prevent the lower back from rotating—they shouldn’t be used to create rotation.

**How Not To Perform Rotational Exercises**

When performing rotational exercises, you should never rotate your lumbar spine. There are three things you need to be aware of to prevent your lumbar spine from rotating.

### **Avoid Russian Twists and Other Similar Exercises**

Russian Twists are one of the most popular exercises for training the obliques. But to perform the exercise, you literally have to rotate your lower back. It might not cause any pain when you’re doing it—especially if you’re a young, healthy athlete—but it can result in long-term lower-back problems. Moral of the story: If you feel you need to rotate your lower back to perform an exercise, don’t do it. http://d.adroll.com/cm/r/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/f/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/b/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/w/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/x/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/l/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/o/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/g/out?google_nid=adroll4https://www.facebook.com/tr?id=318831151635485&cd%5bsegment_eid%5d=USH75MJAQNCXVCV6XDSJLM&ev=NoScripthttp://googleads.g.doubleclick.net/pagead/viewthroughconversion/933633792/?label=Fk6-CPjm2wkQgL6YvQM&guid=ON&script=0&ord=7133114922016539http://ib.adnxs.com/seg?add=897781&t=2http://googleads.g.doubleclick.net/pagead/viewthroughconversion/933633792/?value=0&label=YOCWCPDN8QkQgL6YvQM&guid=ON&script=0&ord=7133114922016539https://www.facebook.com/tr?id=318831151635485&cd%5bsegment_eid%5d=TA7RQF2PANATBPEFU645PP&ev=NoScripthttp://googleads.g.doubleclick.net/pagead/viewthroughconversion/933633792/?label=Ya-CCLiXhBUQgL6YvQM&guid=ON&script=0&ord=7133114922016539http://ib.adnxs.com/seg?add=1966885&t=2https://www.facebook.com/tr?id=318831151635485&cd%5bsegment_eid%5d=5SHVFYXH7VBNNM6HDWBNOZ&ev=NoScripthttp://googleads.g.doubleclick.net/pagead/viewthroughconversion/933633792/?label=YOCWCPDN8QkQgL6YvQM&guid=ON&script=0&ord=7133114922016539

### **2. Loading Sport-Specific Movements**

According to Holman, you will rotate through your lower back to some extent in sports movements, such as a tennis serve. These are performed at high speed but with very little load. Don’t try to perform exercises in the weight room that look exactly like your skills. “If you go into the gym and try to reproduce these types of motions and load it up, the body isn’t really designed to do that with the same velocity and will lead to injury,” Holman says.

### **3. Using Poor Form on Rotational Exercises**

Many great rotational exercises, if done wrong, can have the same effect as Russian Twists. For example, one of the biggest mistakes is rotating through the lower back on Med Ball Rotational Throws.

“There’s tons of rotation in the hip, there’s tons of rotation in the thoracic spine,” says Holman. “You shouldn’t need to rotate through the lumbar spine.”

Besides potentially causing an injury, this can have serious performance deficits, because you’re not training your core how it was designed to function. “People who get used to having a sloppy spine in their exercises not only will damage their spine, but they’re not going to have the stability to lock up with someone on the field,” Holman says.

How to Properly Perform Rotational Exercises

The key to performing rotational exercises is to think of your torso as a cylinder. Your lower back shouldn’t twist. Instead, it should rotate along with your hips toward your target. Below are Holman’s guidelines for performing a rotational exercise or movement, assuming your target is to your left:

1. Drive and pivot off your right foot. Driving off the ground puts power into the ground, which then travels up through your body. Pivoting on your back foot is the first step to rotating toward your target—if you don’t pivot, you’ll ultimately rotate through your lumbar spine. It also protects your rear knee by allowing your joints to stay aligned.
2. Thrust your right hip forward. You get all the power of your glute and hip rotators contributing to the movement. Also, your hips are designed to rotate, which again prevents your lumbar spine from rotating.
3. Keep your abs tight. Bracing your abs keeps your lumbar spine stable and allows more power to transfer through your core to your upper body.
4. Drive your rear shoulder toward your target. Your t-spine is designed to rotate, so this provides the mobility you need to complete the movement. It also adds an extra boost of power.
5. Keep your chest up. Imagine that a string is attached to your head. This prevents you from leaning forward, which causes lumbar rotation.
6. Land in a controlled stance. Don’t perform any movement at a speed you cannot control, and always finish in a balanced position.

If you have difficulty executing this sequence, there may be a mobility issue you need to address. For example, tight [hips](http://www.stack.com/video/3825527031001/worldclass-workouts-with-todd-durkin-how-to-relieve-tight-hamstrings-and-hips/) or a tight [upper back](http://www.stack.com/video/3782366814001/elite-performance-with-mike-boyle-how-to-fix-a-tight-and-immobile-back/) can cause you to compensate and rotate through your lower back. If you suffer from tightness in either of these areas, take the time to fix it to become a more powerful and durable athlete.

Source: STACK September 2015